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Emotional Happiness and Psychological Distance: How Does Happiness and Psychological Distance Change during Vacation?

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this study was to examine the variations in emotions during vacation and to explore if such variations depend on psychological distance perceived by vacationers. We proposed that there are changes in affect balance during the course of vacation as well as the mental construal of psychological distance.

Research Design, Data, and Methodology - Repeated measures ANOVA was used to examine the variation in emotion and psychological distance of 66 holiday makers who were traveling to different destination for vacation. Data were collected in 2 months with the help of a travel agency.

Results - We find that there are variations in emotions during the vacation at different points in time as well as perceived psychological distance. Also we find some evidence that suggests emotional happiness does depend on perceived mental distance to some extent.

Conclusion - Our study replicates the findings of previous studies in a novel way and illustrates the robustness of the nature of emotions during vacation and indicates certain time points where the happiness of vacationers can be enhanced. Perceived psychological distance do have an effect on how happy an individual feels during the vacation

Keywords: Happiness, Vacation, Psychological Distance, Emotions.

JEL Classifications: I31, M31, Z30.

1. Introduction

Recent studies have highlighted the variations in emotions of tourists during vacation (Yeqiang et al., 2013; Nawijn, 2012). They find that changes in emotion at different time-intervals are related to length of vacation. To expand the understanding of the variations in emotions we include a new dimension of mental construal to explain fluctuation in emotions of travelers during vacation. It has been suggested that perceived distance rather than actual distance can explain individuals' mindset when making travel decisions (Ankomah & Crompton, 1992). Space should be interpreted

as a combination of knowledge and imagination with our individual and social characteristics instead of just places that exist independently (Bailly, 1986). Following the same vein we argue that psychological distance, the mentally construed distance which comprises of temporal, spatial, social and hypothetical distances, (Trope & Liberman, 2010) are relevant to the travel domain and are helpful in explaining the variations in emotional happiness.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Travel and Emotional Happiness

Traveling is a leisure activity undertaken for experiencing

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comfort and joy. As individuals come across new environment and events; emotion, as it is a conscious response to human stimuli, is bound to vary. To understand individuals' responses to their life experiences, a measure of happiness called subjective well-being (SWB) is widely used. SWB is conceptualized as the overall recognition of one's life as a whole (Yang, Sun, & Park, 2015; Veenhoven, 1984). People often evaluate happiness based on two inferences: how nice they feel most of the time (i.e., affective component) and the degree to which their life meets their wants (i.e., cognitive component; Veenhoven, 2009). How satisfied one is with his life is driven by both cognitive and affective component. Life circumstances do play a critical role in well-being but do not precisely affect happiness because their effect on happiness depends largely on how they are perceived (Lyubomirsky, 2001). For example, being married or getting a promotion makes a person happy only if he or she judges these circumstances to be positive, satisfying, and meaningful. Therefore subjective wellbeing, i.e. how well an individual feels at certain time irrespective of their achievements is often measured as a scale of happiness (Nawijn et al., 2012). Especially in the field of tourism SWB can be more representative of an individual's happiness as people take vacation for relaxation and pleasure irrespective of their cognitive life elements such as social status, personal achievement etc. Affect, mood, and emotions are the affective dimensions of happiness. Moods originate internally and do not directly motivate behavior (Beedie, Terry, & Lane, 2005). Affect is a more general construct that includes both moods and emotions. Emotions are reactions to events and stimuli that happen in an individual's environment (Beedie, Terry, & Lane, 2005) and are therefore extremely useful in tourism domain (Mitas et al., 2012).

There are many studies that categorize emotions such as basic emotions (Zelenski & Larsen, 2000), circumplex of emotions (Kikutani, Ikemoto, Russell, & Roberson, 2016), as well as distinguishing positive and negative emotions (Van, Toth-Gauthier, Saroglou, & Fredrickson (2016). Basic emotions are universally recognized and easily interpreted through specific facial expressions, regardless of language or culture (Ekman, 1999). The six basic emotions are happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust. Another frequently used categorization of emotions in the field of SWB is the one based on valence (positive and negative) as it helps to generate valid and reliable indicator of the subjective happiness. When individuals judge how they feel, they compare their positive and negative emotions at the same time (Veenhoven, 2013). This construct, usually referred to as "affect balance," is operationalized as the difference between an individual's mean score on positive emotions minus the mean score of negative emotions (see Kolanowski, Haitsma, Meeks, & Litaker, 2014; Veenhoven, 1984). This affect balance has been conceptualized as Emotional Happiness in present study. From the vacation

perspective, we argue that emotional happiness will fluctuate during the vacation. Specifically we hypothesize that,

<H1> There are variations in emotional happiness during vacation.

2.2. Psychological Distance and Travel

Unlike the real distance between places, psychological distance is the internal feelings held in mind with being near or far from some person, place or event (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Many factors such as previous experiences, personal beliefs, perceived closeness etc. affect and individuals psychological distance (Sousa & Bradley, 2006; Ankoman & Crompton, 1992). According to construal level theory people perceive events at various psychological distances such as: temporal distance, spatial distances, social distances etc. (Trope & Liberman 2010). One's perceived psychological distance from a place or event can make them keep some distance in their mind even when they are actually at the place itself. As the perception of these distances are psychologically held and can depend on actual distance, these distances can vary depending upon the actual duration of the travel. It has been suggested that psychological distance depends on person's experience with real distance (Williams, Huang, & Bargh, 2009). For example distance may vary upon before starting a journey or on the planning phase of the vacation, during different time intervals of the vacation and at the end of the journey. Specifically, though social distance and hypothetical or experiential distance may be held intact mentally (or might vary as well depending on the experiences and interaction with foreigners or destination residents), spatial and temporal distances can be argued to vary during the duration of the vacation. Based on the discussion so far following hypothesis is proposed,

<H2> There are variations in psychological distance during vacation.

2.3. Psychological Distance and Emotional Happiness

Though the inclusion of psychological distance in tourism literature might sound plausible, there are no such studies yet from which we can draw inferences about how might psychological distance effect emotional happiness of tourists. However, many studies have shown that these mentally construed distances do affect emotions (Wong & Bagozzi, 2005; Ebert & Meyvis, 2011). When people visit different places it is possible that people can have a different perception about these mentally construed distances related to culture or experiences which can lead to arousal of some positive as well negative emotion. The baseline of this argument is that though temporal and spatial distance, at most of the time, may vary without any change in emotion, the social and hypothetical distance might still affect how

people feel during the vacation. So it can be argued that such psychological distances can have effect on emotions during the vacation hence varying the emotions at different psychological distance levels. Based on these arguments following hypothesis is proposed,

<H3> Emotional happiness varies at different levels of psychological distance.

3. Method

Our sample was composed of 66 Koreans from 20 to 64 years of age with mean age of 50 years, who were traveling to China (21), Turkey (16), Canada (14) and Boracay (15) for a vacation. 42 percent were male and 89 percent were married. 33 percent of them earned between 3 and 5 million won per month with only 7.6 percent earning less than 3 million won a month. 15 percent earned more than 1 billion per month. One third of the travelers were housewives, 17 self-employed, 1 student and the others were full-time workers.

Questionnaires were given to respondents who were contacted through a travel agency in a metropolitan city of South Korea and were planning a vacation in near future. Data were collected over 2 month period. The main variables of interest were the emotions they felt before, during and after the vacation, and the psychological distance

they perceive in mind during the same period. For measuring emotional happiness, Van Katwyk et al. (2000)'s subjective well being scale was adopted. Respondents rated on 7 points scale about their experiences on ten positive emotions (e.g. calm, excited, energetic etc.) and ten negative emotions (e.g. angry, anxious, depressed etc.) at five different points in time. The difference between the rating on positive and negative emotions served as our measure of emotional happiness at any particular time. Psychological distance was measured through the instrument developed by Grosse and Trevino (1996) where the respondents rated their perceived distance from temporal, spatial, social and general psychological perspective on 1 to 7-points likert scale with higher score meaning shorter or lower the distance. For example, one item was "I feel close to the people of (destination)" and ratings were, 1= not at all to 7 = extremely close.

The time period were proportionately divided depending upon the vacation period. Respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire five times during their vacation. First before they actually started the vacation, i.e. during their planning phase, then after they arrive at the destination, then at the middle of their vacation, then at the final day of their vacation and finally after they arrive back home from their vacation. So, they completed the questionnaire once before vacation, once after returning from the vacation and three times during their vacation, i.e. once on arrival, once on final day and once in the middle.

<Table 1> Factor Analysis and Internal Consistency of Positive and Negative Emotions

	T1		T2		T3		T4		T5	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Positive Emotion										
Ease	.731		.781		.853		.875		.824	
Calm	.717		.816		.893		.904		.890	
Content	.792		.894		.819		.849		.817	
Energetic	.793		.917		.898		.866		.842	
Excited	.840		.873		.857		.875		.899	
Ecstatic	.878		.916		.901		.906		.940	
Inspired	.804		.881		.886		.925		.922	
Satisfied	.766		.826		.753		.806		.785	
Relaxed	.819		.852		.884		.915		.917	
Enthusiastic	.865		.837		.905		.780		.882	
Negative Emotions										
Angry		.952		.943		.811		.974		.659
Anxious		.770		.939		.924		.977		.784
Bored		.951		.938		.893		.914		.811
Depressed		.953		.933		.959		.981		.909
Disgusted		.953		.929		.971		.983		.965
Discouraged		.958		.886		.954		.453		.965
Frightened		.947		.871		.977		.966		.953
Furious		.942		.767		.967		.981		.910
Gloomy		.938		.521		.975		.984		.945
Cronbach's Alpha	0.978	0.937	0.961	0.944	0.979	0.963	0.914	0.964	0.966	0.951

4. Results

Factor analysis on each of the five time-points revealed distinct two factor model for each point. <Table 1> shows the factor score and associated cronbach's alpha at each point. All the other loadings were less than .3 and are not shown in the table.

As expected, the participants in our study scored higher on positive emotions. Overall, the mean positive emotion score was 4.75 (SD = 1.05) and the mean negative affect score was 1.49(SD = 0.64).

Emotional happiness was calculated by first creating a composite score of positive and negative emotion at each time points and then a happiness index was created by finally subtracting negative emotion from positive emotion. Now we have happiness indices of five different points in time. This method has been popularly used in research involving happiness (Nawijn et al., 2012; Veenhoven, 1984). <Table 2> shows the mean and standard deviation of emotional happiness at different point in times.

<Table 2> Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Happiness

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Happiness at T1	3.3458	1.10479
Emotional Happiness at T2	2.7838	1.32365
Emotional Happiness at T3	3.3285	1.51853
Emotional Happiness at T4	3.2781	1.64802
Emotional Happiness at T5	3.5596	1.42665

Greenhouse-Geisser corrected repeated measures ANOVA showed that mean emotional happiness differed significantly between time points ($F(2.91, 189.135) = 8.22, P < 0.05$). This provides support for our first hypotheses that emotional happiness varies during vacation. Pairwise comparison in <Table 3> further provides evidence that emotional happiness fluctuates during the vacation.

<Table 3> Pairwise Contrast of Emotional Happiness

Pairwise Comparisons						
(I) Emotional Happiness		Mean Differe nce (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.b	95% C.I. for Differenceb	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	.562*	.138	.000	.286	.838
	3	.017	.137	.900	-.256	.291
	4	.068	.157	.669	-.247	.382
	5	-.214	.117	.072	-.447	.020
2	1	-.562*	.138	.000	-.838	-.286
	3	-.545*	.172	.002	-.889	-.200

3	4	-.494*	.179	.008	-.852	-.136
	5	-.776*	.142	.000	-1.060	-.491
	1	-.017	.137	.900	-.291	.256
	2	.545*	.172	.002	.200	.889
	4	.050	.101	.622	-.152	.253
4	5	-.231	.128	.076	-.488	.025
	1	-.068	.157	.669	-.382	.247
	2	.494*	.179	.008	.136	.852
	3	-.050	.101	.622	-.253	.152
5	4	-.281*	.122	.024	-.524	-.039
	1	.214	.117	.072	-.020	.447
	2	.776*	.142	.000	.491	1.060
	3	.231	.128	.076	-.025	.488
	4	.281*	.122	.024	.039	.524

*p < .05

To test our second hypothesis, a composite measure for psychological distance at each point in time was created (all $\alpha > .8$). <Table 4> shows the mean and standard deviation of psychological distance at different points in time.

<Table 4> Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Distance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Psychological Distance at T1	3.7652	1.34155
Psychological Distance at T2	3.6364	1.31499
Psychological Distance at T3	4.2159	1.09973
Psychological Distance at T4	4.3030	1.18688
Psychological Distance at T5	4.2462	1.41455

Greenhouse-Geisser corrected repeated measures ANOVA revealed the mean psychological distance differed significantly between time points ($F(3.152, 204.870) = 11.462, P < 0.05$). This provides support for our second hypotheses that psychological distance varies during the vacation. Pairwise comparison in <Table 5> further provides evidence that psychological distance fluctuates during the vacation.

<Table 5> Pairwise Contrast of Psychological Distance

Pairwise Comparisons						
(I) Psychological Distance		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% C.I. for Difference	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	.129	.095	.178	-.060	.318
	3	-.451*	.133	.001	-.716	-.185
	4	-.538*	.139	.000	-.816	-.260
	5	-.481*	.129	.000	-.739	-.223
2	1	-.129	.095	.178	-.318	.060
	3	-.580*	.138	.000	-.855	-.304
	4	-.667*	.144	.000	-.955	-.379
	5	-.610*	.124	.000	-.857	-.363

3	1	.451*	.133	.001	.185	.716
	2	.580*	.138	.000	.304	.855
	4	-.087	.105	.412	-.298	.123
	5	-.030	.149	.839	-.328	.267
4	1	.538*	.139	.000	.260	.816
	2	.667*	.144	.000	.379	.955
	3	.087	.105	.412	-.123	.298
	5	.057	.122	.644	-.188	.301
5	1	.481*	.129	.000	.223	.739
	2	.610*	.124	.000	.363	.857
	3	.030	.149	.839	-.267	.328
	4	-.057	.122	.644	-.301	.188

*p < .05

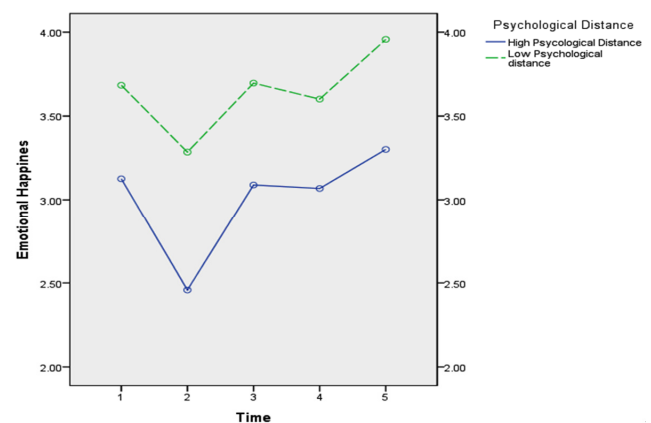
For testing our third hypothesis which proposed emotional happiness does vary with psychological distance, we created two groups. As psychological distance was a measured variable, we created a composite psychological distance index by combining the average psychological distance at different time points and dividing them into two groups with high psychological distance and low psychological distance below and above mean (mean = 4.303). High psychological distance refers to the group below mean and low psychological distance refers to the group above mean. Individuals in high psychological distances were the ones who felt greater distance from their environment and the lower psychological distance individuals felt mentally close to their environment. We created these groups to enable us to examine how different levels of psychological distance affect emotional happiness of vacationers. To assess if changes in emotion differs at different level of psychological distance we ran a mixed between-within subject repeated measure ANOVA with psychological distance as between subject factor. There was a significant between-subject effect of psychological distance on emotional happiness ($F(1, 64) = 4.548$, $p < .05$). Mean emotional happiness at higher and lower psychological distance at different time points have been shown in <Table 6>. This provides support for our third hypothesis.

<Table 6> Psychological Distance and Emotional Happiness

	Time-points	Mean Emotional Happiness	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
High Psychological Distance (low proximity)	1	3.126	.171	2.785	3.467
	2	2.458	.201	2.057	2.859
	3	3.089	.237	2.615	3.563
	4	3.068	.259	2.550	3.586
	5	3.301	.221	2.859	3.744
Low Psychological	1	3.684	.212	3.261	4.106
	2	3.285	.249	2.788	3.782

distance (high proximity)	3	3.697	.294	3.109	4.284
	4	3.601	.322	2.958	4.243
	5	3.957	.275	3.408	4.506

Furthermore, an interesting pattern emerged showing the relationship between levels of perceived psychological distance and emotional happiness at different time points. As shown in <Figure 1>, individuals perceiving lower psychological distance, who felt closer to their environment depicted a higher level of happiness that those with higher psychological distance. It can be seen that although the perceived psychological distance is different, the pattern in which they change in levels of happiness at different points in time is similar. Individuals in both groups followed same variations in happiness across the duration of the vacation. The perceived psychological distance construed in mind does affect the emotional happiness however, how much an individual feels closer to or further from a place has little effect on the marginal variability in emotions at different points in time. Although we find that perceived distance does affect emotions, we do not find any evidence that this perceived distance would interact with time-points to predict happiness. This argument is further supported by the insignificant interaction between psychological distance and emotional happiness at different time points ($F(2.909, 186.198) < 1$, ns).

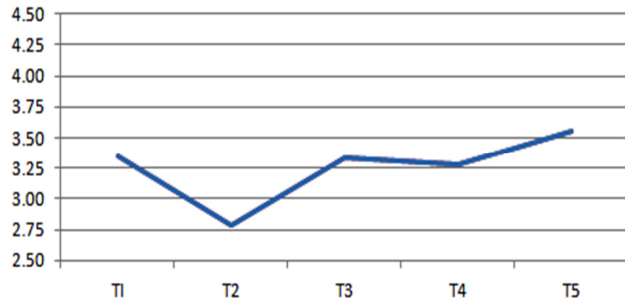


<Figure 1> Emotional Happiness at Higher and Lower Psychological Distance

4. Discussion

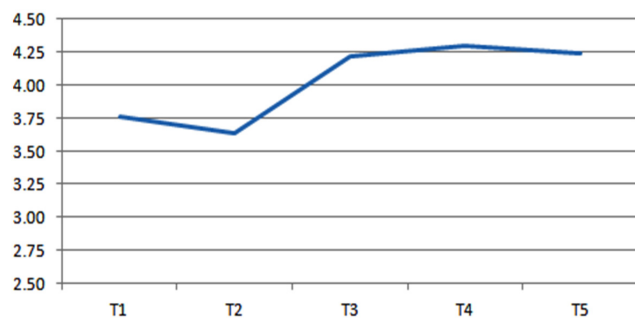
We argued that an individual's level of happiness when they are on a vacation does not remain at constant level and is bound to vary with changes in the environment. Furthermore, it is not only the emotional happiness that fluctuates but also the psychological distance varies at different points in time. The results support both of these

arguments. As we can see that an individual's affect balance significantly changes with time and so does psychological distance.



<Figure 2> Emotional Happiness at Different Points in Time

<Figure 2> shows fluctuation in emotional happiness during vacation. There is a steep decrease in happiness level from T1 to T2, this might be because at T1 i.e. the when the people are getting ready for their vacation their excitement and enthusiasm might have been high but at T2 i.e. when they arrive at the destination, the tiredness of long journey might have decreased the happiness. But gradually people do again feel happy and it is interesting to see that their highest point is at the end when they are back to their own country. An argument one might present here is that after coming back to ones' own country after vacation one might think of an end of good time and back to normal life, and these though of may have an incremental effect in negative emotion. But however our finding suggest that people though they are taking the same route back home as they once did while going for a vacation that decreased their subjective happiness, on arrival to their home country the positive emotions, most likely induces by the memories of the vacation might have heightened their subjective happiness.



<Figure 3> Psychological Distance at Difference Points in Time

Similarly, we can see fluctuations in psychological distance in <figure 3>. As mentioned earlier, higher values indicate closer psychological distance. As seen from the graph, the psychological distance is very large at the beginning of the trip but gradually reduces during the

vacation as people become close with others, not only temporally and spatially but also socially and psychologically.

5. Conclusion and Implication

5.1. Conclusion

The overall purpose of this study was to analyze potential changes in vacationers' emotion and perceived psychological distance over time. Our findings suggests that though vacationers have bumpy start at the beginning, reducing happiness and increasing psychological distance but over time they feel more comfortable with their environment hence increasing their subjective happiness. Contrary to the several findings, (Nawjin et al., 2012) we find that people tend to be happier towards the end of the trip. This suggests a point where holiday makers and event organizers can benefit from vacationers by asking for their comments for their service which could derive a positive word of mouth. Also if they can make their end more exciting and satisfied, loyalty and revisits can be ascertained. The reduced happiness level at the beginning of the trip might be one point at which the event managers work on to boost up the happiness, for example by providing relaxation session on arriving at the destination or reminding them how exciting the trip is going to be.

It might be noted that there are some discrepancies in the findings of previous studies on travel and happiness and current research. Specifically, the research on vacationers' happiness conducted by Nawjin et al. (2012) and Lin et al. (2014), "the happiness curve" seems to be following an inverted U-shaped curve and people tend to be least happy at the end of the trip. In contrary, our findings suggest that happiness is at its peak at the end and is least at T2. These different findings are due to the timing of measurement of emotions. In the studies in contrary to ours, emotions were measured everyday starting from the beginning of the trip till the end, when they pack their bags and are ready to leave for home. Then, the time intervals were created based on the length of the vacation and emotions were averaged across these intervals to determine the level of affect balance (emotional happiness) at each time-interval. On the other hand our study measured emotion at specific time points and the time points, as mentioned already, were a day before starting the trip (T1), the day when they actually arrive at their destination (T2), the final day on the vacation (T4), the day they arrive at their home (T5) and the day in between T4 and T2 (i.e. T3). It is obvious that T2 represents the day when they landed on their destination. At T1 i.e. the when the people are getting ready for their vacation their excitement and enthusiasm might have been high but at T2 i.e. when they arrive at the destination, the tiredness of long journey etc.

might have decreased the affect balance. Furthermore, the studies contradicting our findings where people tend to be least happy at the end suggest the reasons to be packing bags and hassles of checkouts etc., however in our study the end of the trip is the end of whole vacation and they are freshly looking forward for their usual lives. Our finding suggest that people though they are taking the same route back home as they once did while going for a vacation that decreased their subjective happiness, on arrival to their home country the positive emotions, most likely induced by the memories of the vacation and the excitement of sharing it with their friends and families might have heightened their subjective happiness. In sum, our study does not invalidate the findings of previous research but in looks at it at a different perspective by taking into account different time points to assess the happiness and does find variations, hence replicating the previous findings.

5.2. Implication

Our research provides some useful and important implication for both theoretical literature as well as travel-related businesses. First, it replicates the findings of previous studies in a novel way and illustrates the robustness of the nature of emotions during vacation. Though the positive emotions are always greater than negative emotions so emotional happiness is positive at all times, but there are variations in emotional happiness at different time points. Second, it introduces the concept of psychological distance in travel research and illustrates that though people might be physically close to their travel destination but these mentally construed distances are still held in mind but not at constant level. There are variations in psychological distances during the vacation. And finally, marketers of destination organization and travel agencies can benefit from our findings by formulating actionable plans as to where it can capitalize on the positive word-of-mouth of travelers and where more input is required to boost the happiness of tourists.

With respect to the third hypothesis our study did find some relationship between psychological distance and happiness, but however, at this point we could not fully capture meaningful inferences on the relationship between psychological distance and emotional happiness as psychological distance was measured and generalized over the time points. However, the result gives us some insights about how that relationship might be, such that higher psychological distance during the vacation might be related to low happiness. This suggests openness in one's mind toward other environment and culture might improve subjective happiness during vacation.

This research focused on a planned vacation that the vacationers were already aware of and had been more or less expecting the changes in their environments. Further

studies could examine how the responses of tourists might be in the context of group tours and individual holiday making. Also, as this research employed a composite measure of psychological distance, further researches could explore how the distinct psychological distances (eg. social, cultural etc.) might affect how one feels. Similarly analyzing psychological distance in more concrete terms rather than measuring, such as physical distance between ones home country and travel destination, travelling to culturally different places etc. might provide additional insights on travel and happiness.

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